

Regan talks education bucks. How much?

by Ken Burke

Secretary of State Gerald Regan is a very intense man.

He sits behind the large wooden desk of his Halifax constituency office, wearing a bright red "Sport Nova Scotia" T-shirt, and focusing intently on balancing both parts of his pen on the desk top. He is being interviewed by two staff members of the Dalhousie Gazette about the Federal Government's Established Program Funding (EPF) transfers to provinces, but that isn't what seems to interest him. Regan's eyes are almost at desk-level as he releases the compartments of the pen. Both parts remain standing as he finishes another carefully worded statement about the Federal Government's sincere concern over Higher Education in Canada.

When talking about this concern or province-bashing over Post-Secondary funding, Regan, the Federal Minister responsible for Higher Education, is cool, relaxed, almost visibly day-dreaming. But certain questions cause his attention to shift instantly to the eyes of his interviewers, addressing them personally as he decides upon an answer. Gerald Regan is what people refer to as a "politician's politician".

Some things go askew, though.

Regan stated in August that Universities should attempt to hold tuition increases to the Federal six-and-five per cent guidelines - months after virtually every University in the country had set their tuition and planned their budgets accordingly. When questioned about this, Regan said he was unaware that most Universities set their tuition in the Spring. Besides being the Federal Minister Responsible for Universities, Gerald Regan is also a former Premier of Nova Scotia. As Premier, he had to deal with University funding and the setting of tuition. During the last three years of his term in office, funding to Universities was set in March.

Regan also seemed very surprised when informed about the size of tuition hikes at most Canadian universities. He said, "I don't know if I can go very far beyond what I have done," when asked if

he would pay more attention to student issues such as tuition hikes in the coming year.

The re-negotiation of EPF funding with the provinces was much more familiar turf for Regan to speak on.

Regan stated that a federal priority in the EPF negotiations is finding some kind of insurance that money transferred to the provinces is actually spent on post-secondary education. "It really can be used by the provinces for other purposes," he said. "I'd like to see accountability so that we (the Federal Government) and the public in general would receive clear statements of how much is contributed by the government and how much by the provincial governments."

He then switched to one of his seemingly favourite topics - the provinces' contribution to post-secondary education. "It's a priority for us to have some assurance the provinces contribute a reasonable amount. Most provinces year by year have been lowering the percentage contributed. We think if they would increase their commitment at the same rate as the government of Canada, then the financing of Post-secondary education would be in better shape."

To find this "accountability", the Feds have a trick up their sleeve. "I have informed the Ministers of Education," he said, "that we intend to divide EPF into the Health and Education segments so the dollars transferred for education are clearly identifiable for that purpose."

On the subject of Federal Cut-backs to EPF funding, Regan was adamant in stating there would be none. After last year's threatened cut of \$1.5 billion from EPF transfers was halted by adverse public reaction, the Federal Government are publicly telling a different tale this year. "We are prepared to increase our dollar transfer for the education portion," said Regan. "The Prime Minister offered back in January to increase it at about the rate of 12% for the next two years without changing the system if the provinces would agree to maintain their percentage

position during these two years. They never accepted that."

According to Regan, the six-and-five society would not extend to cover Federal Government grants to the Provinces for Education and other purposes. "Unless the situation grows much worse, I don't see that happening," he said. However, he quickly qualified that remark, stating that the six-and-five controls are a total government decision that transcends the power of his department.

While he noted that some provinces did increase their contribution later, Regan chuckled slightly as he recalled Nova Scotia's position. "They immediately indicated they were going to increase it (the funding) by an acceptable amount but are now apparently backing away from it and indicating to universities that they're going to be receiving substantially less than they were told at budget time."

The only answer Regan could give as a solution to Provincial cut-backs was the cure-all of identifying how much money the Feds are transferring. "Then you know who the hell to chase for more money," he commented.

Of the EPF negotiations themselves, he was optimistic. Regan thought they were "progressing reasonably well at the official level".

During the first half of October, he will meet with the Provincial Education ministers to "see if we can come to agreement on certain aspects of the new arrangement".

Running at the same time as the EPF negotiations are also negotiations with the provinces over the national Student Aid plan. Regan would not give out any exact details as to the Federal negotiating stance, but said the Federal Government would like to move towards paying half the cost of Student Aid, of which it currently pays less than half compared to the provinces. He also expressed a desire for common loans criteria across the country and administering the loans independent of the Federal and Provincial governments. Following the Federal Government's other positions, he wants to make clear which portion



of student aid comes from the provincial and federal levels of government. Of the Federal Government's much talked about grant program to be included in the new Student Aid package, Regan would say nothing other than that it was being negotiated along with the other aspects of Student Aid.

The decision by the Toronto-Dominion Bank to limit its money available for student loans to ten per cent above outstanding loans, together with the Bank of Montreal's actions which make it more difficult to get student loans, provided another subject during the interview. Regan was unwilling to say that the Federal Government would actually do anything if students were denied loans. "I don't think the arrangement made in 1964 (over the banks' handling student loans) is an enforceable contract," he said. Regan said the best way to ensure the banks continue to handle loans at the current rate of interest is by publicity. He was "very pleased with the Royal Bank and Bank of Nova Scotia making public statements supporting existing student loan arrangements. By "publicity" it was soon apparent what Regan meant, when he leaned forward and remarked, "It's not only the politicians you can march on, you know."

Regan was also anxious to demonstrate the Federal Government's concern that people not "misinterpret" the National Training Act. The National Training Act is a bill passed by the Federal Government this year which attempts to channel Federal manpower funds to occupations and industries where there is a growing demand not being filled by routine training programs. Many student leaders fear this will take money away from post-secondary education in favour of vocational and technical training, or even route money into some University fields such as Engineering and away from others, such as the Liberal Arts.

Regan was quick to respond that the National Training Act does not involve EPF dollars. "The EPF dollars will continue to go in the way that relates to university education and not to job training," he said, although he admitted that, "There are those who would like to see the Federal assistance to Universities more targeted to specific programs. But I'm confident I carry the Cabinet in that matter." According to Secretary of State Gerald Regan, students have nothing to fear from the National Training Act, "Not as long as I'm the Minister."

Want to expand your darkroom knowledge?

Dal Camera Club

lets you do just that.

We have complete darkroom facilities and are now accepting 1982 -83 members.

Check out Dal Camera.
Room 320 S.U.B.
424-2509

YUKON JACK ATTACK #1.

The Snake Bite.

Release 2 fluid ounces of Yukon Jack, a dash of juice from an unsuspecting lime, tumble them over ice and you'll have skinned the Snake Bite. Inspired in the wild, midst the damnably cold, this, the black sheep of Canadian liquors, is Yukon Jack.

Yukon Jack



The Black Sheep of Canadian Liquors.
Concocted with fine Canadian Whisky.